

VZCZCXR09097

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHDH RUEHIHL RUEHKUK

DE RUEHGB #1555/01 1661611

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 151611Z JUN 09

FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3469

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001555

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/15/2019

TAGS: PTER PGOV KISL IIZ

SUBJECT: ASSASSINATION OF SUNNI MP STRONGLY CONDEMNED
ACROSS POLITICAL SPECTRUM

REF: BAGHDAD 1546

Classified by Deputy Political Counselor Brian Shukan for
reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The June 12 assassination of prominent Sunni MP Harith al-Ubaydi rattled parliamentarians across the political spectrum. Prime Minister Maliki joined the mourners at a ceremony the following day. Ubaidy, an outspoken human rights advocate, was popular across the board and was a close Embassy contact, with a reputation for opposing sectarianism and promoting universal rights for Iraqi citizens. Speaking out after his death, many parliamentarians suggested he had been killed because of his association with moderate, non-sectarian Islam. One leading Sunni MP privately suggested to us that he could have been killed by the Ministry of Interior, taking revenge for his aggressive criticism of MOI officials for human rights violations - a charge we doubt. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Dr. Harith Al-Ubaydi, an MP for the Sunni Iraqi Islamic Party and deputy chair of the parliamentary Human Rights Committee, was assassinated June 12 at the Al-Shawwaf Mosque in Yarmouq, a predominantly Sunni neighborhood in West Baghdad. Ubaidy, himself a Sunni cleric, had just finished delivering the Friday sermon at the mosque. According to multiple accounts, an assailant approached him as he chatted with several worshippers and shot him in the head with handgun, also shooting to death Ubaidy's bodyguard. The assailant then tossed a hand grenade, wounding 9-10 others, before exiting the mosque. Shortly thereafter, the assailant, reportedly only 15 years old, was shot dead by Iraqi Security Forces.

¶3. (SBU) Though not the first member of parliament to be assassinated this year (Sadrists Yusuf al-Uqaili was killed by a car bomb in February), Ubaidy's death prompted a much larger, cross-sectarian outpouring of anger and grief. On the morning of June 13, the day after his assassination, the flag-draped caskets of Ubaidy and his body guard were laid out for display in the lobby of the Council of Representatives building. Then, as covered live by multiple Iraqi satellite stations, a military band played a funeral march as an honor guard escorted the caskets to waiting vehicles. Marching behind the caskets were Prime Minister Maliki, Parliamentary Speaker Ayad Samaraie, Vice President Abdel Mahdi, and numerous other ministers and members of parliament.

¶4. (SBU) In TV interviews, VP Abdel Mahdi, Speaker Samaraie, and others vigorously condemned the crime and proclaimed Ubaidy a martyr who had been killed because of his moderation and commitment to a post-sectarian Iraq. That afternoon, in a special session of parliament, members of each parliamentary bloc, from his fellow Sunni Tawafug/Iraqi Islamic Party MPs to the leaders of Maliki's Da'wa Party, Sadrists, and the Shiite Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) each took turns praising Ubaidy and condemning his murder as an attack on Iraq and an attempt to turn the clock back to the darkest days of sectarian violence. Many parliamentarians we spoke with attributed the crime to "takfiris" (those who condemn others as infidels - often used synonymously with Al-Qaeda and like-minded Sunni extremists).

¶5. (SBU) The Charge and poloffs attended a June 14 condolence

ceremony also attended by the Minister of Defense, senior military and police officers, acting ISCI president Ammar al-Hakim, and dozens of parliamentarians.

¶6. (C) Ubaidy was a close Embassy contact and one of Iraq's most active human rights campaigners. He was scheduled to participate in an International Visitors Program trip to the U.S. in July. At a June 11 parliamentary debate (reftel), Ubaidy criticized the Minister of Human Rights for failing to produce reports on human rights violations and demanded that the minister be summoned to the CoR for questioning (reftel).

The debate featured scathing criticism of the Ministry of Interior's human rights record. Ubaidy had aggressively pursued MOI abuses through his human rights committee role and through his private human rights NGO, including MOI officials he considered responsible for violations. For this reason, Iraqi Islamic Party MP Shatha al Obosi, also a member of the human rights committee, told poloff she believed MOI officials had put out a hit on him.

¶7. (C) Comment: While we cannot completely rule out Obosi's theory that some MOI officials wanted him dead, neither are we aware of any evidence to suggest they ordered his assassination. In fact, his assassination constitutes a double embarrassment for the MOI, both because police at the mosque failed to protect him and because the incident, reported around the world, reinforced perceptions that Iraq remains unstable, exactly the image the Maliki government is straining to shake off. We also note (Sunni) Iraqi Islamic Party officials have been repeatedly threatened and targeted by Al-Qaeda in Iraq, which considers the IIP traitors and infidels for participating in the Shi'a dominated GOI.

¶8. (C) Comment continued: The only silver lining in this tragic affair has been the chorus impassioned condemnation

BAGHDAD 00001555 002 OF 002

from across the political spectrum, and the vows of Iraqi politicians from all sects that they would not allow the perpetrators to push them back into previous patterns of sectarian violence. End comment.

FORD